THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH):

(a) and (b) Government is aware of reports attributing these remarks to the former U.S. President regarding the meeting that took place between him and the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Nawaz Sharif on 4 July 1999 in Washington D.C.

Pakistan's armed intrusion in Kargil was defeated through the skills, professionalism, courage and valour of the Indian Armed Forces. The international community, including the United States, had criticised Pakistan for its action in Kargil and had advised the Government of Pakistan to reverse its intrusion.

Passport offices

2636. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of External Affairs be pleased to state:

(a) the number of passport offices in Rajasthan, Delhi and Orissa (State-wise) and (city-wise);

(b) whether Government have any proposal to relax the procedure with a view to expedite the issue of passport and to reduce the time taken in the process by opening more such offices in the above States; and

(c) if so, the details of the guidelines issued to the passport of each State in the above matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) One passport office each is located in Rajasthan (Jaipur), Delhi (Delhi) and Orissa (Bhubaneshwar).

(b) and (c) There is no proposal to open more passport offices in the above mentioned States. However, several measures have been taken to simplify and expedite processing of passport applications in various passport offices including the Passport Offices in Rajasthan, Delhi, and Orissa. These measures are : (a) computerisation of processing procedures, (b) simplification of passport application form, (c) introduction of Tatkal Scheme for issue of out of turn passport, (d) decentralisation of passport services to enbale submission of completed application form at designated speed post centres at district level, (e) provision of dispatch of passports by speed post, (f) introduction of machine writing of passports and (g) expediting police verification report with the Passport Officers holding regular consultation with the police authorities in their respective areas etc. Besides, the Govt. has recently constituted a Committee to review the passport issue system aimed at simplifying the process of issue of passports.

Chinese support of Pakistan on Kashmir

2637. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state: